DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 265 CS 012 510

AUTHOR Collins, Norma Decker
TITLE Motivating Low Performing Adolescent Readers. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CS-96-06
PUB DATE 96
CONTRACT RR93002011
NOTE 3p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Instructional Innovation; *Learning Processes; Lifelong Learning; *Low Achievement; Reading Materials; *Reading Motivation; Secondary Education; *Student Motivation; *Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests; *Reading Uses

ABSTRACT

This Digest focuses on motivating the low performing adolescent in a remedial reading or subject area classroom--the idea is that students who are disengaged from their own learning processes are not likely to perform well in school. The Digest points out that such adolescents are often caught in a cycle of failure and that secondary teachers must help the student break the cycle of failure. It offers several practical and effective methods for motivation from the research literature that can be used by the classroom teacher. The Digest also states that a wide variety of teaching materials can help provide for differences in students' ability to learn, and that teachers must continue to create contexts which promote success. It concludes that there is much truth in the statement "The only way to improve reading skills is to read." (Contains eight references.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication EDO-CS-96-06

Indiana University
2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 150

D112

Bloomington, Indiana 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847; (800) 759-4723

ED 396 265

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Motivating Low Performing Adolescent Readers

by Norma Decker Collins

The focus of this *Digest* will be on motivating the low performing adolescent in a remedial reading or subject area classroom. The premise is that students who are disengaged from their own learning processes are not likely to perform well in school.

Remedial Readers at the Secondary Level

Remedial readers at the secondary level are often caught in a cycle of failure. They have frequently been involved in a heavy skills instruction program, and when "it" did not work, they were given more of the same. Thus, many disabled readers never saw reading as a language operation. They never saw reading as something they could do–it was something to be avoided.

Readers who have negative experiences with reading generally view reading as a process of getting the word right rather than an act of making sense of the material. They do not hear a voice on the page; they do not know they can skip words; they do not know that they must do different things with different kinds of materials.

Secondary teachers must help the low achieving or low performing student break the cycle of failure. Low performing students need the opportunity to revalue themselves. They need experiences with texts that are relevant. They need to acquire strategies that will result in comprehension. Building confidence is essential to improving the performance of secondary readers. Assisting and motivating low performing students is a requisite to improved performance.

Ammann and Mittelsteadt (1987) recount how the failure cycle was broken for one group of high school students. By using newspapers instead of traditional reading skills material for classroom reading and writing activities, students who had failed for years as language users experienced success as readers. Through an intervention on the part of the teacher/researcher, students were provided strategies for reading. And for the rest of us, it shows how a teacher can make a difference in the secondary classroom.

Lifelong Learning

In order for any student to become a lifelong learner, he or she must be able to handle print–environmental print, recreational print, and vocational print.

Norma Decker Collins is an Assistant Professor of Language Arts at the University of Wyoming at Laramie.

Unfortunately, the disabled reader has often been so removed from reading as a tool for living and learning, that he or she has given up. By helping students find personal reasons to engage in print, you help them realize the ultimate goal of reading–that of constructing personal meaning. Fuchs (1987) suggests, as a first step, that teachers select books for young people that reflect the actual interests of adolescents. It is also important for teachers to have suggestions available for parents who want to help their children become active readers. By understanding why some teenagers dislike reading, parents and teachers can embark on the difficult task of encouraging students to read in developmentally appropriate ways.

Are Reading Problems Necessarily Reading-Specific?

Language scholars Moffett and Wagner, in the book *Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading K-13* (1983), contend that problems in reading are not necessarily reading-specific and that reading comprehension is not distinct from general comprehension. The skills required for comprehending texts, like identifying the main idea, recalling details, relating facts, drawing conclusions, and predicting outcomes, are operations that apply to activities in life. It is understandable that these skills have wound up as reading skills because they are demonstrated when a student reads. However, Moffett and Wagner feel that reading comprehension is merely comprehension.

Based on this definition of comprehension, we must look outside of reading as well as toward reading for instructional strategies. We must look at all low performing students–not just those who have been identified as reading disabled. We will begin by looking at 3 major causes of incomprehension: poor motivation, lack of experience, and egocentricity. Any one of these or any combination is likely to be manifested in the reading of low achieving or low performing students. Frequently, students who are not successful in the classroom have not had experiences with language in meaningful, social situations. By listening to oral and recorded reading, asking questions, dictating stories, and working in small groups, students experience the communicative nature of language (Carr, 1995; Wallace, 1995). According to Moffett and Wagner, only widespread involvement in language can solve the problem of poor motivation.

Because students at the secondary level are required to use textbooks, it is important for them to see what reading informational books has to offer. By browsing a variety of books and scanning them for something they want to know about, readers see the usefulness of reading. It is the job of teachers to construct situations where students can find personal reasons to make the effort to comprehend books.

CS012510

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

By doing this, reading is reinforced as a useful language operation–not seen by the student as a testing ground for self worth.

Another "reading problem" for the low performing student is lack of experiential background. When a text refers to things or concepts with which the reader has no familiarity, he or she will not comprehend the material. Films and television can help enlarge experience and supply vocabulary (Greenwood, 1989; Aiex, 1988). If these options can be used to strengthen the basic competencies which students are expected to develop through reading, they will play a valuable instructional role.

Students also struggle with texts because of subjectivity. Certain words or phrases may trigger irrelevant associations for readers which interfere with an accurate reading. Irrelevant associations cause readers to ignore portions of a text or pay an inordinate amount of attention to others, so that relationships among statements are distorted and meaning is misconstrued. The learner needs to hear other viewpoints about a text and compare these to his or her own thinking.

Small group discussions are important in this regard. When a reader finds out that others read a text differently, the reader may be helped to realize that his or her interpretation was limited by a subjective view. Decreasing egocentricity is necessary for improving student performance in reading.

Necessity of a Wide Variety of Teaching Materials

There are many reasons for students lacking motivation in reading. However, a wide variety of teaching materials and teaching techniques help provide for differences in students' ability to learn. Supplementary materials like newspapers, magazines, games, films, and audio and video tapes offer additional ways for students to acquire information. Any medium which stimulates students' interests and involvement is worthy of consideration.

By asking students to complete projects at the end of their reading assignments, students may see a reason for reading. For example, developing a mural, making a diorama, or constructing a model encourages students to read a text for practical purposes. This is particularly successful when students are exploring subjects that are of interest to them. Projects or oral presentations also provide a chance for students to collaborate with others. Group work may reduce the apprehension poor readers frequently experience and motivate them to use language socially and purposefully.

Students who are not performing at grade level may not be doing their part in the learning process. This is frustrating for teachers who wonder if motivation lies entirely within their domain. It is a "Catch-22" situation. Some students have developed an indifferent attitude towards learning. By the time they get to the secondary school, that negativism or indifference is pretty well embedded (Kos, 1991). Yet, to help the low performing student succeed in school, you must dismantle the behaviors (defense mechanisms?) that surround the act of reading.

Because teachers want students to achieve in the classroom, they must continue to create contexts which promote success. It takes patience and forbearance to establish an atmosphere of trust that will encourage risk-taking on the part of the low performing student. Allowing students to choose some of the instructional materials they use, some of the topics to explore, and some of the assignments to complete enhances the likelihood that students will respond to the subject matter.

Another step that you may take involves making reading assignments more accessible. By writing a brief introduction to explain how the assigned reading fits into the rest of the chapter, the unit, or the short story, you may improve the efficiency of students' reading. The following suggestions may do the same: providing an abstract to highlight important ideas; providing an outline or list of headings to identify major concepts; supplying a list of definitions for vocabulary development; and applying a directed reading activity.

The only way to improve reading skills is to read. As educators, we must continue our efforts to motivate low performing students. Whether we make available appropriate reading material at the appropriate time, supplement students' reading processes with varied print and nonprint experiences, and/or individualize instruction in whatever way is realistic, the goal is to whet the low performing or low achieving student's appetite and foster an interest in reading that will contribute to the student's ability to lead a full, productive life.

References

Aiex, Nola Kortner (1988). "Using Film, Video, and TV in the Classroom." ERIC *Digest*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.D [ED 300 848]

Ammann, Richard, and Suzanne Mittelsteadt (1987). "Turning on Turned off Students." *Journal of Reading*, 30(8), 708-15. [EJ 350 581]

Carr, Dorothy (1995). "Improving Student Reading Motivation through the Use of Oral Reading Strategies." [ED 386 687]

Fuchs, Lucy (1987). *Teaching Reading in the Secondary School*. Fastback 251. Bloomington, IN: Phe Delta Kappa Educational Foundation. [ED 281 165]

Greenwood, Scott C. (1989). "Summarize, Compare, Contrast, and Critique: Encouraging Active Reading through the Use of Cinema." *Exercise Exchange*, 35(1), 22-24. [EJ 394 965]

Kos, Raylene (1991). "Persistence of Reading Disabilities: The Voices of Four Middle School Students." *American Educational Research Journal*, 28(4), 875-95. [EJ 438 615]

Moffett, James, and Betty Jane Wagner (1983). *Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading K-13: A Handbook for Teachers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Wallace, James (1995). "Improving the Reading Skills of Poor Achieving Students." *Reading Improvement*, 32(2), 102-04. [EJ 506 434]

This publication was prepared with partial funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract number RR93002011. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.